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**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**

February 23, 2009

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The Honorable Hillary Rodham Clinton  
Secretary of State  
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Dear Secretary Clinton:

I write to share my dismay, also voiced by a number of leading human rights organizations, at your comments during your recent Asia trip indicating that human rights will not be a priority in your engagement with China. These statements come on the heels of the U.S. failing to participate in the United Nations review of the human rights record of China, among other worst offenders. Both are deeply troubling commentary on this administration's commitment to human rights, and are undoubtedly disheartening for scores of Chinese citizens, including the imprisoned Catholic bishops, persecuted house church leaders and repressed Tibetan Buddhists.

Certainly there is a place for pragmatism in diplomacy. It may be that the Chinese government, when confronted with its gross human rights violations, would dismiss U.S. concerns and tell us not to interfere in their "internal matters." But we need look no further than the Sharanskys and Solzhenitsyns of recent history to know that it is equally pragmatic to believe that bold, public proclamations on the importance of liberty, freedom, and the absence of repression are cause for great hope to those political prisoners who languish behind bars.

In short, words have power. They have the power to inspire, or deflate; they have the power to give vision or to stifle hope. But for words to inspire the hope for a day when the Chinese people can worship freely, where the press is not censored, where political dissent is permitted—they must first be spoken.

Silence is itself a message. Martin Luther King Jr. famously said, "In the end, we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends." America has always been a friend to the oppressed, the persecuted, the forgotten. Has our allegiance changed?

Words are, of course, strengthened by policy, and policy is shaped by personnel. You have a number of important decisions before you in this regard: Will the new U.S. ambassador to China be singularly focused on good bilateral relations, and increased trade—or will that diplomat tirelessly work to ensure that our embassy is an island of freedom in a sea of repression? Will the assistant secretary for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor be someone known and trusted by the human rights community? Will the new ambassador for International

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Religious Freedom worship with the underground church and press the Chinese government to respect this first freedom?

This administration is young and finding its sea legs. My hope is that the solid rock of freedom will be your foundation, rather than the sinking sand of repression.

I urge you to change course, lest this country itself be changed.

I am reminded of a story told by Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel which speaks to this very point: "One day a Tzadik came to Sodom; He knew what Sodom was, so he came to save it from sin, from destruction. He preached to the people. 'Please do not be murderers, do not be thieves. Do not be silent and do not be indifferent.' He went on preaching day after day, maybe even picketing. But no one listened. He was not discouraged. He went on preaching for years. Finally someone asked him, 'Rabbi, why do you do that? Don't you see it is no use?' He said, 'I know it is of no use, but I must. And I will tell you why: in the beginning I thought I had to protest and to shout in order to change *them*. I have given up this hope. Now I know I must picket and scream and shout so that they should not change me.'"

Sincerely,

Frank R. Wolf  
Member of Congress